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FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9319
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DOHA 000503

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/11/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MCAP](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: QATAR'S ARMED FORCES CHIEF OF STAFF LAMENTS BUDGET
CUTS; MILITARY EXERCISES COULD BE AFFECTED

Classified By: Ambassador Ambassador Joseph E. LeBaron for reasons 1.4
(b and d).

Key Points

-- Major General Hamad bin Ali al-Attiyah, Chief of Staff, told Ambassador August 10 that the Qatar Armed Forces might cut or combine some military exercises already scheduled, given the significant budget cuts levied by the Amir.

-- Al-Attiyah said defense spending is the lowest priority within the GOQ: "We are the shortest man" in the budget process, he commented, with an air of resignation more than rancor, in response to Ambassador's question about the GOQ's progress in building a second runway at Al-Udaid.

-- Other subjects in the meeting included: the SECDEF letter notifying Qatar that the USG will be unable to provide the LAIRCM system for its new C-17s, the related issue of a LAIRCM system for the Amir's aircraft, intra-GCC military cooperation, and the proposed dates for the next MCC.

-- Also attending the meeting were Lt Col Max Sears, OMC Qatar, and Brig Gen Khalfan A. al-Sowaidi, Assistant to the Chief of International Relations.

COMMENTS

-- The budget cuts to the military were already known. That they were disproportionately larger than the cutbacks to any other part of the GOQ was not known.

-- It is at least remotely possible that the Amir's cuts in Qatar's defense budget lie behind the recent rumors about an attempted coup, or at least coup plotting, by senior members of the Qatar armed forces.

-- There just might be rising resentment among Qatari military officers that Qatar's armed forces are getting less while the Al-Thani continue their (unchecked) spending. That resentment alone could have lead to the rumors, even without any actual coup plotting.

-- That said, Qatar has been one of the last affected by the global Great Recession, and it will probably be one of the first to emerge from it.

End Key Points and Comments.

1. (C) Below are subjects covered during the nearly hour-long meeting August 10th.

2nd Runway at Al Udaid Air Base

¶2. (C) Ambassador referenced a letter dated 3 Aug 09 that he had received from LTG North, recent AFCENT Commander. LTG North's letter emphasized the importance of building a second runway at the air base and his concern that progress there had slowed in recent months. Ambassador relayed these concerns and asked Major General al-Attiyah to share his thoughts on the project.

¶3. (U) (Note: In response to projected growth at Al Udaid, Qatar originally proposed and contracted to build a second taxiway to the west of the current runway. AFCENT encouraged GOQ to build a second runway as well to deal with increased traffic expected as QEAF moved its Doha-based military planes to Al Udaid. Qatar agreed to fund and build the second runway. However, in recent months its negotiations to revise the original construction contract have stalled, reportedly due to the slowing economy. End Note.)

¶4. (C) Major General al-Attiyah acknowledged Ambassador's concerns over the slow progress on the runway project. He affirmed that negotiations over a new contract with the builder have been put on hold and he doesn't see them moving anywhere for the rest of this year. He said that it is all due to funding and budget issues, that Qatar has been affected by the worldwide economic downturn and that every GOQ expenditure is being considered carefully in that light

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C-17

¶5. (C) Ambassador presented a letter dated 22 Jul 09 from Secretary of Defense Gates to Major General al-Attiyah concerning Qatar's C-17s and the LAIRCM system that Qatar had requested to be installed on them. The Ambassador emphasized three points from the letter: 1) the USG commends GOQ for its purchase of the aircraft and the consequent increase in its strategic airlift capability, but is unable to approve sale of the LAIRCM system for the aircraft due to export controls; 2) there was regrettable confusion early on in the sale over whether LAIRCM was an integral part of the aircraft construction or a post-market addition (it was the latter); and 3) the refusal of the USG to approve LAIRCM export in no way signals a change of policy toward Qatar.

¶6. (C) The COS made no substantive comment to the letter. He knew it was coming. He had already expressed his deep concern and frustration about the issue. Ambassador had the sense that, even though Al-Attiyah made no comment, for Al-Attiyah the matter was not resolved and would not be forgotten.

Head of State Aircraft

¶7. (C) To offset the C-17 letter, Ambassador said he had some possibly good news about Qatar's obtaining LAIRCM for at least some of its Head of State (HoS) aircraft. He noted that he had been in contact with General Petraeus and that both he and the general supported USG taking a new look at Qatar's request, recently renewed. Qatar's efforts to address previous USG concerns over the purchase were appreciated, and would help pave the way for another look.

¶8. (U) (Note: Qatar requested LAIRCM as early as 2004 for its HoS aircraft. The request was approved then, but for unknown reasons Qatar never signed the Letter of Offer and Acceptance (LOA). The LOA subsequently expired. Qatar submitted another Letter of Request (LOR) in 2006 but a decision on that request suffered lengthy delays and finally

came back negative. In their objection to the sale, Secretary of the Air Force/International Affairs (SAF/IA) mentioned several concerns over providing Qatar with LAIRCM, including: 1) the relevant aircraft were not used solely for Head of State travel; 2) the aircraft were owned by Qatar Airways; 3) Qatar designated upwards of 11 aircraft as HoS vessels, which SAF/IA thought excessive; 4) Qatar had no secure facilities or procedures to store the aircraft; and 5) Qatar had no vetting process for the technicians who would maintain and service the LAIRCM systems.)

¶9. (C) Ambassador referenced a letter dated 23 Jul 09 from Major General al-Attiyah to SecDef Gates in which COS expressed his concern to gain an appropriate "DIRCM" system to protect HoS aircraft. Ambassador clarified that DIRCM is an umbrella-term for various directed-energy IR countermeasure systems, one that includes the laser-equipped LAIRCM AAQ-24 system. However, Ambassador's larger point was that he and Gen Petraeus would support having the USG reconsider getting a LAIRCM system to some of Qatar's Head of State aircraft.

MCC Dates

¶10. (C) Ambassador presented a letter dated 27 Jul 09 from Ambassador Vershbow. The letter thanked COS for his hospitality during Vershbow's 20-21 Jul 09 visit to Doha, and proposed 11-13 Jan 2010 as dates for the next Military Consultative Commission. COS promised to review and consider the dates.

Intra-GCC Military Cooperation

11 (C) MG Al-Attiyah noted that he recently had spoken with both the Emir, now back in Qatar, and the Crown Prince. Both told him that the QAF must operate for now with the money already allocated. He noted that the Crown Prince had advised him to be patient, that the military "would be taken care of," but that for now QAF would need to shift funds around as necessary to support the projects and exercises that it deems priorities.

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¶12. (C) The COS mentioned that the QAF is considering cutting or combining some military exercises already scheduled. He believed in the value of exercises, and he wanted to find a way to keep doing as many as possible. He mentioned trying to combine local exercises with larger ones. When Ambassador asked which ones in particular he intended to cut or combine, Major General al-Attiyah did not say.

¶13. (C) Major General al-Attiyah segued from his remarks on funding constraints to mention Qatar relations with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. He remarked that he wished to increase Qatar's contribution to regional cooperation efforts, such as increasing the number of Qatar personnel at the GCC combined headquarters, but that those efforts were also on hold due to lack of funds. He commented that even with the current financial pressures Qatar still wished to improve GCC synchronization aspirations. He mentioned, for example, that Qatar preferred to have an annual combined GCC-sponsored military exercise but that other GCC members showed less enthusiasm. He lamented that "Right now, we have one only every other year or every few years." Also, he spoke vaguely of desiring to increase regional capability in various ways and specifically mentioned air missile defense.

¶14. (C) Major General al-Attiyah spoke at length of his personal view of the potential for greater GCC cooperation

opportunities, and how some of the wariness that GCC members have felt toward each other in the past has lessened. He used recent border dispute resolutions as examples: Qatar and Saudi Arabia agreeing to demarcate their boundary, and Qatar and Bahrain agreeing to let the International Court of Justice settle their dispute over Hawar and Fasht al-Dibal islands. He joked how Qatar had really wanted Hawar Island instead of Fasht al-Dibal but then ended up finding oil near Fasht al-Dibal anyway, while Hawar Island has so far proven to be of little value to Bahrain.

LeBaron